

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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R 091228Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9655

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 0443

EXDIS

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TAGS: PFOR, MARR, TH

SUBJ: U.S.-RTG DISCUSSIONS ON U.S. FORCE LEVELS

REF: (A) STATE 003604, (B) BANGKOK 20195

SUMMARY: I HAVE DISCUSSED POSSIBILITY OF U.S.-RTG DISCUSSIONS ON U.S. FORCE LEVELS FURTHER WITH THE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE SUPREME COMMAND, THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND OTHER KEY FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS. THE FOREIGN MINISTER REFUSES TO BUDGE AND INSISTS THAT CONSULTATIONS MUST BE HELD BEFORE HE LEAVES OFFICE IN LATE JANUARY AND THAT THERE MUST BE A PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT THESE DISCUSSIONS HAVE BEEN HELD. HE AGREES, HOWEVER, THAT WE WOULD MAKE NO PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING FURTHER REDUCTIONS OR FUTURE FORCE LEVELS. IN THIS MESSAGE WE PROPOSE A SCENARIO WHICH WE BELIEVE WILL MEET OUR OBLIGATION TO CONSULT WITH THE THAI, WHICH WAS RE-CONFIRMED BY THE SECRETARY WITH THE THAI FOREIGN MINISTER IN NEW YORK ON OCTOBER 1, WITHOUT FURTHER COMPLICATING THE SECURITY SITUATION IN INDOCHINA. END SUMMARY.

1. AT A BILATERAL MEETING BETWEEN SECRETARY KISSINGER AND FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN, WHICH ASSISTANT SECRETARY HABIB AND I ATTENDED IN NEW YORK ON OCTOBER 1, SECRETARY KISSINGER INFORMED THE THAI FOREIGN MINISTER THAT WE WOULD NEGOTIATE OUR MUTUAL PROBLEMS IN FULL AND FRANK FASHION; IN PARTICULAR, WE WOULD NOT JUST INFORM THE THAI WHAT WE INTENDED TO DO BUT TAKE THEM INTO OUR CONFIDENCE. UPON

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HIS RETURN TO BANGKOK CHARUNPHAN HELD A NEWS CONFERENCE IN

WHICH HE STATED THAT HE AND THE SECRETARY AGREED THAT "AFTER THE END OF THE PRESENT YEAR AND WHEN WITHDRAWALS FIXED HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT, THE SITUATION WILL BE REVIEWED AND RE-CONSIDERED IN ORDER TO WORK OUT PLANS REGARDING FURTHER WITHDRAWALS, WHICH IT IS EXPECTED WILL BE CARRIED OUT BY STAGES AFTER THE END OF THE PRESENT YEAR."

2. ON A NUMBER OF OTHER OCCASIONS, AS FOR EXAMPLE ON DECEMBER 16, CHARUNPHAN SAID "AFTER THE DECEMBER 31 TIME LIMIT IS REACHED, WE WILL REVIEW THE SITUATION AND TALKS SHOULD BE STARTED AGAIN." AS A RESULT, ON THE BASIS OF ASSURANCES REGARDING CONSULTATION HE RECEIVED FROM THE SECRETARY IN NEW YORK, CHARUNPHAN IS PUBLICLY COMMITTED TO RESUMING DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THE U.S. PRESENCE BEFORE HE LEAVES OFFICE, PRESUMABLY AT THE END OF JANUARY.

3. ON DECEMBER 26, CHARUNPHAN RAISED THE SUBJECT WITH ME (REF (B)), AT THAT TIME HE DID NOT FULLY INDICATE THAT HE INTENDED TO GO PUBLIC IN ORDER TO SHOW THAT DISCUSSIONS WERE IN FACT TAKING PLACE. I ACQUIESCED IN HIS DESIRE FOR DISCUSSIONS AND INDICATED THAT AT A FIRST MEETING WE WOULD REVIEW THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA. THERE WAS NO INTENTION OF ADVISING THE THAI ON FORCE LEVELS AT THAT TIME OR REACHING ANY AGREEMENT ON BASES.

4. AFTER RECEIVING REF (A), I RAISED THE POSSIBILITY OF POSTPONING ANY MEETING ON FORCE LEVELS UNTIL AFTER THE THAI ELECTIONS WHEN I TOOK UNDER SECRETARY MAW TO CALL ON GENERAL KRIANGSAK. I TOLD KRIANGSAK I HAD LOOKED FORWARD TO CONSULTING WITH THE RTG AND SHARING U.S. VIEWS ON FUTURE FORCE GOALS AT AN EARLY DATE. HOWEVER, IN VIEW OF THE DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE AND THE CURRENT SITUATION IN INDOCHINA, I SUGGESTED THAT ANY FURTHER DISCUSSION OF FUTURE PLANS SHOULD BE HELD BACK UNTIL A PRACTICAL REASSESSMENT CAN BE MADE. I TOLD HIM THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS REVIEWING THE OVER-ALL SITUATION IN SEA AS A MATTER OF URGENCY AND THAT I WOULD CONTINUE TO COMMUNICATE OUR ASSESSMENT TO THE RTG. I ADDED THAT I INTENDED TO SPEAK WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER THAT AFTERNOON, JANUARY 9, ON THE SAME MATTER.

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5. GENERAL KRIANGSAK EXPRESSED HIS DEEP CONCERN OVER THE WAY EARLIER U.S. WITHDRAWALS HAD BEEN HANDLED AND A DESIRE FOR CLOSE CONSULTATION IN ADVANCE IN ORDER THAT THE RTG COULD PLAN PROPERLY. THE RTG HAD NOT ALWAYS HAD ADVANCE NOTICE, WHICH HE BELIEVED WAS QUITE UNFAIR SINCE THEY WERE OFTEN CAUGHT UNAWARE AND WERE PLACED IN THE POSITION OF HAVING TO PRETEND THAT THEY PARTICIPATED SUBSTANTIVELY IN JOINT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE U.S. I PROMISED TO CONSULT

AS SOON AS IT WAS POSSIBLE TO REAACH REALISTIC CONCLUSIONS
BUT I SAID THAT AT THE MOMENT THE NEW SITUATION IN
INDOCHINA PREVENTED US FROM MAKING ANY LONG RANGE JUDGMENTS
SINCE FURTHER WITHDRAWALS AT THIS TIME MIGHT ENCOURAGE THE
NORTH VIETNAMESE TO EXPAND THEIR OFFENSIVES.

6. AT A DINNER WHICH I GAVE ON JANUARY 8 FOR SENATORS
THURMOND AND SCOTT, I TOLD PRACHA KUNAKASEM, DIRECTOR
GENERAL FOR INFORMATION AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AND CLOSE CONFIDANT OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER, THAT IN VIEW
OF THE INTENSIFIED FIGHTING IN BOTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA,
I WOULD LIKE TO POSTPONE TROOP LEVEL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE
RTG UNTIL AFTER ELECTIONS. I ASKED HIM TO INFORM CHARUNPHAN
OF MY DESIRE TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT THIS POSSIBILITY AT THE
MEETING BETWEEN HIM AND UNDER SECRETARY MAW THAT HAD BEEN
ARRANGED FOR THE FOLLOWING DAY.

7. AT THE AFTERNOON MEETING WITH CHARUNPHAN AND MAW ON JANUARY
9, WITH AMBASSADOR ANAN AND PRACHA BOTH PRESENT, I AGAIN
TOLD CHARUNPHAN THAT, CONSIDERING THE CURRENT
OFFENSIVES IN VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA, WE SHOULD POSTPONE OUR
CONSULTATIONS ON FORCE LEVELS UNTIL AFTER THE THAI ELECTIONS,
SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 26. I POINTED OUT THAT EVEN A MEETING
ON THIS SUBJECT COULD GIVE FALSE SIGNALS TO HANOI.

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EXDIS

8. CHARUNPHAN COUNTERED THAT HE BELIEVED A MEETING ON
THE U.S. TROOP PRESENCE WAS NECESSARY, PARTICULARLY SO THAT
HE COULD ANSWER THE RECURRING PRESS QUERIES ON THE SUBJECT.
I SUGGESTED WE HOLD A REVIEW AND NOT MAKE IT PUBLIC. HE

REPLIED THAT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO MAKE THE FACT OF OUR MEETING PUBLIC, BUT THAT IT WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY TO MAKE OR ANNOUNCE ANY DECISIONS. I REITERATED MY CONCERN ABOUT A MEETING TAKING PLACE AT A TIME WHEN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARE PUTTING SUCH STRONG PRESSURE ON SOUTH VIETNAM, CAMBODIA IS UNDER GREAT MILITARY STRESS, AND EVEN THE PATHET LAO ARE SHOWING SIGNS OF BEING MORE BELLICOSE. CHARUNPHAN REMAINED FIRM THAT A MEETING MUST TAKE PLACE AND THAT THERE MUST BE SOME PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT A MEETING HAD BEEN HELD.

9. CHARUNPHAN SAID THAT NEXT WEEK HE WILL BE TIED UP WITH THE VISIT OF LAO INTERIOR MINISTER PHENG PHONGSAVAN'S 40-MAN DELEGATION. HE THEREFORE RECOMMENDED THAT A FORCE LEVEL MEETING BE HELD DURING THE WEEK BEGINNING JANUARY 20. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE MEETING WOULD NOT BE ON HIS LEVEL BUT IN THE TRADITIONAL FASHION BETWEEN AMERICAN AUTHORITIES, AND GENERAL KRIANGSAK ABETTED BY AN MFA OFFICIAL (UNDER SECRETARY PHAEN WANNAMETHI HAS PARTICIPATED PREVIOUSLY).

10. I THEN RECOMMENDED THAT FROM SUCH A MEETING A STATEMENT SHOULD EMERGE TO THE EFFECT THAT THE RTG AND THE USG HAD REVIEWED THE SITUATION, THAT THEY WERE MAKING SOME PROGRESS ON THE QUESTION OF FUTURE FORCE LEVELS, BUT THAT ANY DECISION WOULD BE PREMATURE IN VIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION.
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TION IN INDOCHINA. CHARUNPHAN MADE NO REPLY.

11. PRACHA, AFTER THE MEETING, TOLD ME THAT THE PRESS THAT MORNING HAD AGAIN RAISED THE SUBJECT OF U.S. FORCES. HE TOLD THEM THE DISCUSSIONS WERE CONTINUING BETWEEN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AND THE U.S. MISSIONS.

12. UNTIL FAIRLY RECENTLY CHARUNPHAN HAD BEEN TELLING US THAT FORMAL TALKS CAN WAIT UNTIL THE INSTALLATION OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT. HE HAD CHANGED HIS POSITION AND IS UNCHARACTERISTICALLY FIRM. I CAN ONLY SPECULATE THAT ANAN (WHO WAS PRESENT AT OUR TALKS JANUARY 9) IS STIFFENING CHARUNPHAN'S SPINE AND HAS CONVINCED HIM THAT HE MUST DO WHAT HE HAS TOLD THE PRESS--HOLD FORMAL DISCUSSIONS WITH US AFTER COMPLETION OF THE EARLIER AGREED WITHDRAWALS. ANAN MAY ALSO BE PLAYING BACK THE ASSURANCES HE RECEIVED FROM THE SECRETARY ON SEPTEMBER 22 THAT WE WOULD GO ALONG WITH EARLY INITIATION OF A DIALOGUE ON JOINT PLANNING FOR FURTHER GRADUAL REDUCTIONS.

13. IN VIEW OF THE PAST TRACK RECORD, I SEE NO WAY OF REFUSING TO HOLD DISCUSSIONS IF, AS NOW APPEARS LIKELY, CHARUNPHAN PERSISTS. WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO SEEK WAYS TO SLIP THIS BEYOND THE ELECTIONS BUT, GIVEN THE

HIGH LEVEL ASSURANCES CHARUNPHAN HAS RECEIVED, I DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD BE IN OUR INTERESTS TO IGNORE HIM OR STONEWALL HIM.

14. CHARUNPHAN'S MESSAGE IS THAT A MEETING MUST TAKE PLACE, THAT THERE MUST BE A PRESS RELEASE TO THAT EFFECT, BUT THAT NOTHING SUBSTANTIVE HAS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED. WE THUS DO NOT SEE A REALIZATION OF THE FEARS IN PARA 1 OF REF (A) THAT THERE WILL BE AN ATTEMPT TO NAIL DOWN AN AGREEMENT. IN FACT, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO USE THE MEETING TO GET A PUBLIC RTG STATEMENT THAT FURTHER REDUCTIONS WERE NOT APPROPRIATE AT THAT TIME IN VIEW OF THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA (TO WHICH HIGH LEVEL THAI HAVE REPEATEDLY LINKED OUR FORCE LEVELS). AT THE SAME TIME, WE CANNOT EXPECT THIS LAME DUCK GOVERNMENT TO MAKE ANY STATEMENT BINDING ON ITS SUCCESSOR.

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15. IF A MEETING THE WEEK OF JANUARY 20 IS INEVITABLE, I WOULD PROPOSE TO USE IT TO REVIEW PROGRESS ON OUR PREVIOUSLY AGREED WITHDRAWALS AND THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA. IF THE SITUATION IN THAT AREA CONTINUES TO BE SERIOUS, WE WOULD SEEK THAI AGREEMENT FOR A STATEMENT ALONG THE FOLLOWING GENERAL LINES: IN CONTINUATION OF THE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT AND THE UNITED STATES EMBASSY, A MEETING WAS HELD ON (INSERT DATE) BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THAI-ALLIED COORDINATING COMMITTEE AT THE U.S. MISSION. DURING THIS MEETING THE GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION IN THE INDOCHINA AREA WAS REVIEWED. IN VIEW OF THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE CONFLICT IN BOTH CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIETNAM, IT WAS AGREED THAT NO FURTHER REDUCTIONS IN U.S. AIR FORCES STATIONED ON ROYAL THAI AIR BASES WOULD BE MADE AT THE PRESENT TIME. DISCUSSIONS WILL BE RESUMED AFTER THE ELECTIONS AND FURTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS WILL BE MADE AS THE SITUATION CLARIFIES.

16. NOTE: I HAD NO INTENTION IN REF (B) OF SEEKING AUTHORITY TO TELL THE THAI OUR DETAILED THINKING ON FORCE LEVELS. WE WOULD WANT TO REVEAL THIS ONLY GRADUALLY WHEN OUR OWN IDEAS ARE FIRM. I DID, HOWEVER, WANT SUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE FOR OUR OWN USE IN ORDER THAT WE CAN BETTER LEAD THE THAI TO OUR ULTIMATE GOAL AS WELL AS KEEP ABREAST OF USAF PREPARATORY FORCE REDUCTION ACTIVITIES. I REALIZE THE COMPLEXITY OF THIS PROBLEM BUT REITERATE THAT IT WOULD BE MOST USEFUL TO HAVE AT BEST A GENERAL INDICATION OF WASHINGTON'S THINKING. REGARDING PARA 3 OF REF (A), THE DEPARTMENT UNDOUBTEDLY KNOWS THAT WE INFORM THE RTG ON A WEEKLY BASIS OF OUR EXACT FORCE LEVELS. TO SAY PUBLICLY THAT WE NOW HAVE SEVERAL THOUSAND MORE THAN IS ACTUALLY THE

CASE COULD EASILY BOOMERANG. I WOULD PROPOSE DURING THE
RTG-US CONSULTATIONS TO REACH AGREEMENT ON A GENERAL STATE-
MENT THAT WE HAD NOT ONLY REACHED BUT EXCEEDED THE LEVELS
AGREED IN MARCH 1974.

17. PLEASE ADVISE SOONEST.
KINTNER

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